

Honorable Chairmen and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Melissa Olive and I reside in Woodbridge, CT. I am a Board Certified Behavior Analyst at the Doctoral level. I am currently employed by the Center for Autism and Related Disorders (CARD, Inc), a world-wide agency that provides diagnostic services, early and intensive ABA to young children as well as short term intensive ABA for serious behavior problems such as behavioral feeding disorders, aggression, and self-injurious behavior. CARD is also an approved provider for continuing education for BCBAs and BCABAs and we offer numerous courses each year related to continuing education. Prior to working at CARD, I was an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Nevada-Reno where I trained special education teachers to work with individuals with disabilities in a variety of capacities, including Early Childhood Intervention, Preschool Special Education, Special Education Life Skills Classes, Special Education Autism Units, and inclusive classrooms. I was also responsible for developing, implementing, and overseeing the UT-Austin program for training Board Certified Behavior Analysts.

In addition to all of my professional credentials, it is important to know that I have a 30-year-old brother with autism who moved in with me when he was only 13 years old. I have been responsible for overseeing his care since 1993.

I want to thank each of you for your work on this bill and for your commitment to the well-being of children with disabilities.

I am in support of Section 2 of this bill as it relates to the delivery of ABA services within schools. My brother would have benefitted from such a bill many years ago. As you may already know, a number of studies have shown that specific instructional techniques are effective for children. The most recent review (Eikeseth, 2009) noted that children who received ABA made significantly more gains than control group children in a variety of outcome measures. Similarly, in their review of autism treatment research, Rogers and Vismara (2008) concluded that early intensive ABA is the only "well-established" treatment. Reichow and Wolery (2009) recently completed a meta-analysis of early intensive behavior intervention for children with autism. They reported that on average, ABA is an effective treatment for children.

Additionally, research has shown that ABA is also effective for children with other disabilities. For example, Fisher and colleagues (2000) demonstrated that a behavior intervention plan based on ABA was effective for an individual with cerebral palsy (CP) and mental retardation (MR). Hasazi, & Hasazi (1972) used ABA techniques to successfully address math skills for a child with digit reversals. Rasmussen & O'Neill (2006) used ABA techniques to successfully address the problem behavior of 3 students diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders.

In summary, research has demonstrated that ABA can produce substantial gains in children. Thus, it is an appropriate instructional method for children to receive. As such,

those who teach children who need ABA should be appropriately trained to implement this scientifically proven instructional strategy.

As you may already know, many school district employees fail to receive training necessary to implement ABA. This is not a fault to the Universities and alternative training program that educate them but rather due to a system that limits the total hours an undergraduate may be required to complete while also requiring a certain number of hours in areas such as the Core Curriculum. This leaves few semester hours devoted to the use of ABA as a teaching method.

While I am in support of Section 2 of this bill, I must indicate my concern regarding Section 3 of this bill relating to burden of proof. Because of the expense incurred LEAs rarely initiate due process. Most often, it is the parents or guardians who file for due process. If the burden of proof is shifted to the party requesting the hearing then a substantial financial burden is placed on the family. Specifically, families are not experts on teaching methodology let alone on the requirements of IDEA. In order for a family to meet the burden of proof, the family would have to hire educational experts and attorneys to assist them. If a family could afford such extravagances, they would most often have pulled their child from public schools and paid for the education privately. As a family member who has been through a due process hearing for a loved one, it is an extremely stressful event. Requiring burden of proof on top of that would be detrimental to most families who lack the funds to follow through.

Again, I thank you for your commitment to individuals with disabilities. I appreciate your time. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions regarding any of my testimony.